

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson*****DHS Planning and Response:
Preliminary Lessons from Deepwater Horizon***

September 22, 2010 (WASHINGTON) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “DHS Planning and Response: Preliminary Lessons from Deepwater Horizon”:

“This hearing is not the first examination of the oil spill this Committee has undertaken. On June 21st, the Committee traveled to the Gulf Coast to see the effects of the oil spill. On July 12th, the Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight conducted a field hearing in New Orleans to examine the response command structure and to take testimony about the lines of communication between state, local and Federal authorities.

So after we have taken those “close up” shots of this disaster, it is now time to ask about the big picture. Today, we are here to examine lessons from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

Let me be clear. This hearing will not examine the Coast Guard's readiness. By all accounts, the Coast Guard has performed admirably in responding to the largest oil spill in history. The Coast Guard was first on the scene conducting search and rescue following the April 20th explosion on the Deepwater Horizon Oil rig. After the success of the final well kill procedure on September 19th, the Coast Guard is likely to remain in the area overseeing reclamation efforts for a very long time to come.

But as we turn the page on this episode, I want to make sure we do not close the chapter in this book. Instead, we must take the opportunity to examine the Department's role in incident management and the part it plays in coordinating other Federal agencies in any response scenario.

Since 2003, the Department has become the federal agency the public turns to for leadership when a disaster occurs. Yet the Department's involvement and leadership in developing and implementing disaster response plans remains unclear.

The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill is an example of an instance in which the Department was expected to provide leadership in response or recovery activities. Yet—as we all now know-- the Department did not have a role in reviewing or assessing the plans for the response and recovery of this type of disaster. The agency that regulated the industry reviewed the response plans.

In the course of preparing for this hearing, we have discovered other instances in which the Department will likely be expected to play a role in response, but has been given no role in planning.

For instance, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) requires each nuclear power plant to develop and periodically test a detailed emergency response plan. While it appears that FEMA plays some role in reviewing certain aspects of those plans, it is not clear whether FEMA can or should work with the NRC, the private sector owners or local authorities in fine tuning those emergency response plans.

In another instance, under the Clean Air Act, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has oversight of risk management planning at facilities that handle hazardous substances. The owners and operators of those facilities prepare Risk Management Plans (RMPs). Those plans

are submitted to the EPA. The first lesson from the oil spill is that the agency that regulates should not review the disaster response plans.

And it seems that the law could be interpreted to ensure that the Department of Homeland Security is involved in these reviews. Under Homeland Security Presidential Directive/HSPD-8, the Secretary of Homeland Security is the principal Federal official for coordinating the implementation of all-hazards preparedness in the United States. FEMA, reporting to the Secretary, has responsibilities for emergency planning.

Yet, in February, the Department of Homeland Security's Inspector General released a report which found that DHS had not completed a full set of plans for any single disaster scenario. The Department has said that the failure to create these plans is a result of a shortage of federal planners. The Department has also indicated that it does not have authority to oversee Federal agency operations plans or require any agency to coordinate its plans with DHS or other agencies.

So we are here today to examine a very simple proposition—if you fail to plan, do you plan to fail. I hope that we can all agree that failure is not an option.”

#

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Dena Graziano or Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-176, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://homeland.house.gov>